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THE REMISSION OF SINS—I

The remission of sins is most immediately associated in the mind of a Catholic with the Sacrament of Penance; for this sacrament many Catholics in England would simply use the name 'Confession,' and if they reflected upon the question would probably consider it a more suitable name, since, at least, it refers to the most onerous part of the whole rite, whilst 'Penance' is associated with a far less essential, and certainly less onerous complementary duty to be fulfilled, *after* forgiveness has been granted. To many the name Penance might seem something of a misnomer in present practice. And 'Confession' is evocative of the belief in the remission of sins through this sacrament, for much of the teaching concerning this is presented as an answer to the question: Why must we confess our sins to the priest? We are told¹ that Our Lord appointed the apostles as judges, to exercise a juridical power, and that in order that this juridical power of forgiving sins may be exercised, it is necessary to reveal our sins to them, in the person of their successors. He did this after the Resurrection, when he breathed upon the apostles and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained' (John 20:23). And the juridical nature of the apostolic authority had already been set forth in the 'binding and loosing' texts of Matt. 16:18 and 18:18.

The scriptural foundation for the belief in a juridical power of forgiving sins seems quite clear, and it may be a matter of considerable surprise to find that the Fathers of the Church during the first three centuries failed to see this. They do not refer to these texts when dealing with the question of forgiveness of sins committed after the reception of Baptism.² This would not be of particular significance,

¹ cf. Council of Trent, Sess. xiv, cap. 5 (DB 899)

² Origen, it is true, does refer to John 20:23 when stating that even certain sins against God (as distinct from sins against one another) may be forgiven. To the question: When a man sin against God who will intercede for him? (cf. 1 Sam. 2:25), he replies: 'He upon whom Jesus has breathed, as upon the apostles, and who can be known from the fruits, as having made room for the Holy Spirit, and having become spiritual by being led by the Spirit in the manner of a son of God to each of those things to be done according to the word, remits whatever God remits, and retains

if it were not for the fact that precisely during these first three centuries one of the most crucial questions which exercised the Church was whether there be any forgiveness of sins for the baptised. The penitential controversy is one of the most difficult questions in the history of theology, and there is a wide variety of opinions concerning it; but at least all would agree that a body of opinion in the Church expressed grave doubts on the possibility of any such forgiveness. In such circumstances it does seem worthy of note that those who rightly maintained the possibility of forgiveness of sins after Baptism did not have recourse to the text from John. They obviously needed the support of the Scriptures for their teaching; since they did not seek it here we may conjecture that they interpreted the text in a way which, to say the least, gave it a less direct reference to the forgiveness of sins after Baptism than we give to it. Thus Tertullian, arguing strongly enough for the possibility of a second repentance (namely, forgiveness of sins after Baptism) refers to such scriptural evidence as the situation of the various churches mentioned in the Apocalypse who have evidently fallen from their first fervour, and yet are all given 'general monitions to repentance—under comminations it is true; but He would not utter comminations to one *unrepentant* if He did not forgive the repentant.'¹ The Spirit, he claims, has elsewhere demonstrated this profusion of His clemency, and he refers to Jer. 8:4 (LXX), Os. 6:6, Luke 15:7, 10; the parables of the lost drachma, the sheep that has strayed and the prodigal son all provide excellent examples of God's willingness to forgive.² On the question of a juridical power exercised by God's representatives in putting into effect this forgiveness he is silent, and makes no reference to John 20:23.³

¹ 'On Repentance,' chap. viii, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, xi, Edinburgh MDCCCLXIX, p. 271

² *ibid.*

³ Tertullian does, however, provide evidence that Matt. 16:16 was quoted by his adversaries to support their claim to forgive sins against chastity, committed, presumably, after the reception of Baptism: 'But, you say, the Church has the power of forgiving sins. This I acknowledge . . . I now inquire into your opinion, (to see) from what source you usurp this right to the Church. If, because the Lord has said to Peter, "Upon this rock will I build my Church," "to thee have I given the keys of the heavenly kingdom"; or, "Whatsoever thou shalt have bound or loosed

the incurable sins, ministering for God Who alone has power to remit, like the prophets, by speaking not their own things, but those of the divine will for God. The words for the apostles' remission run thus: "Receive . . . (John 20:23)."' (*De Orat.* 28, 9) But it is quite clear that Origen does not see in this text the conferring of a juridical power. The reception of the Spirit gives them that priestly wisdom whereby they know for whom they may intercede by prayer and sacrifice, as in the Old Law. They will not commit the monstrous error of interceding for those who have committed sins which God has no intention of forgiving—the sins unto death. Hence B. Poschmann's claim that here we have an example of interpretation 'für die Vergebungsvollmacht bei der Busse' (*Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, iv, 3, p. 4, fn. 4) is greatly exaggerated.

The Fathers do understand this text as conferring a juridical power, but this power is exercised in the forgiving of sins by the administration of Baptism. As an example we quote St Cyprian, writing during the controversy on heretical baptism: 'But it is manifest, where and by whom remission of sins can be given, that, namely, which is given in Baptism. For to Peter first, on whom He built the Church, and from whom He appointed and shewed that unity should spring, the Lord gave that power, that whatsoever he should loose on earth should be loosed in heaven. And after His Resurrection also, He speaketh to the Apostles, saying, As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit . . . retained. Whence we learn that they only who are set over the Church, and are appointed by the law of the Gospel and the ordinance of the Lord, may lawfully baptise and give remission of sins; but, without, nothing can be bound or loosed, where there is no-one who can either bind or loose.'¹

This interpretation of the texts is in line with the earliest forms of the Creed where the remission of sins is linked with Baptism: 'One Baptism unto the remission of sins.' By the time of Hippolytus (d. 235) 'the prominence of the remission of sins is now so great that the phrase is virtually a synonym for Baptism itself. . . . The whole elaborate catechumenical preparation is seen to be "a vast sacramental dominated by the idea of exorcism."'² On the other hand St Cyril of Alexandria, in the fifth century, clearly states that the text of John confers the power of forgiving sins in two ways: 'They who have the Spirit of God remit or retain sins in two ways, as I think. For they invite to Baptism those to whom this sacrament is already due from the purity of their lives, and their tried adherence to the faith; and they hinder and exclude others who are not as yet worthy of the divine grace. And in another sense, also, they remit and retain sins, by rebuking erring children of the Church, and granting pardon to those who repent.'³

The fact that the early Fathers saw in this text a reference to the

¹ Epistle LXXIII, in *The Epistles of St Cyprian*, Oxford 1868, p. 247. The same two texts are interpreted in exactly the same way by Firmilian, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, when he writes to Cyprian complaining that Stephen, bishop of Rome, recognises the validity of heretical baptism; cf. Epistle LXXV in op. cit., p. 279.

² J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 1950, p. 162.

³ *Commentary on the Gospel according to St John*, II, London 1885, p. 680.

in earth, shall be bound or loosed in the heavens," you therefore presume that the power of binding and loosing has derived to you, that is, to every Church akin to Peter . . . 'On Modesty,' chap. XXI, in op. cit., xviii, Edinburgh MDCCCLXX, pp. 117-8.

power of the apostles to remit sins through Baptism¹ suggests that a fruitful consideration of the sacrament of Penance should take into consideration the relation between the two. Penance, we shall see, is the more laborious and painful way² whereby the Christian recovers the place in the Body of Christ granted to him in Baptism, which he has forfeited by sin. We shall see how the Holy Spirit taught the Church, largely through His inspired word preserved in the Old Testament, to realise that those to whom was given the power of binding and loosing, of forgiving or retaining sins through the Sacrament of Baptism, had also been given the power of repeating such a remission of sin in the Sacrament of Penance, which an early writer calls 'the spiritual Baptism.'³ Considered in this way, we may understand more clearly the place of penitential practices which constitute the external sign of this remission of sins committed after Baptism. But more important, we may realise more clearly that there is no remission of sins except through Christ, the conqueror of sin, and that Penance, therefore, remits sins as Baptism does, by uniting us with Christ and making us one with him, so that his victory over sin becomes ours.

I *Remission of sins through Christ* When we consider the sufferings endured by the Jews during the period which immediately preceded the coming of Our Lord it is not surprising that they had a clear realisation of their sinfulness. There had been the bloody persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes; there had been the humiliation of Roman rule and the indignity of the Idumean dynasty. In such circumstances the longing for deliverance was greatly increased; they prayed for the coming of the Messiah, to give them the peace and prosperity, the freedom and happiness which they could surely hope for, since they were the chosen people of God to whom the promises had been made. The Messiah would restore all things, there would be no longer any grief or suffering. He would take away all this. He would take away all sin. In the past they had won relief from God, whether through David, or Ezechias, or the Servant, or Judas Maccabaeus, for in the past God had forgiven them their sins when they turned to him in sorrow and repentance. But all these partial

¹ From an exegetical point of view, the corresponding words in Matt. 28:16ff., Mark 16:16, and Luke 24:47 make it likely that John 20:23 refers to forgiveness through Baptism; cf. J. Jeremias, in G. Kittel (editor), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, III, 1950, p. 753, ll. 3ff.

² 'Ut merito poenitentia laboriosus quidam baptismus a sanctis patribus dictus fuerit,' Conc. Trident. Sessio XIV, Mansi, XXXIII, 92E.

³ *De Rebaptismate*, n. 10, quoted in B. Leeming, *Principles of Sacramental Theology*, London 1956, p. 191, fn. 31.

remedies would be perfected in the Messiah; he would 'fulfil' them all; he would take away all evil, for he would take away all sin. Thus they taught that the Messiah himself would be without sin: 'Unstained by sin' (Ps. Sol. 17:41), 'No sin will be found in him' (Test. Jud. 2:4 A). All sin would be destroyed in the Messianic kingdom, and men would be sinless: 'They will sin no more, neither will they be chastised all the days of their life, and they will not die because of the chastisement or the (divine) anger; but they will complete the number of the days of their life, and their life will go forward in peace, and the years of their joy will be multiplied in an eternal gaiety and peace, all the days of their life' (Hen. 5:8).¹

The message of the New Testament is that Jesus is the conqueror of sin, and he is the Messiah. He came to save his people from their sins: 'I did not come to call the just but sinners' (Matt. 9:13). He is the friend of sinners (Matt. 11:19) and even dines with them. Such incidents as the anointing by the woman that was a sinner (Luke 7:37ff.), Zachaeus (Luke 19:1ff.), and the cure of the paralytic (Matt. 9:2ff.) preach this message. John the Baptist had prepared the way for Christ by inviting the people to repent and be baptised for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4), a cry which Jesus made his own (Matt. 4:17), and pointing to Jesus had exclaimed: 'Behold the lamb of God, who is taking away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). John receives proof that he was correct in thus recognising the Messiah, when it is reported to him how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed (Luke 7:22), for Jesus's miracles of healing were proof of his power to remit sin, with which sicknesses were intimately connected.² This is not only shown clearly in the cure of the paralytic (Matt. 9:2ff.; cf. John 5:14), but in Our Lord's own declaration in the synagogue at Nazareth: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release³ to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' (Luke 4:18-19). And it is the apostolic message from the first day they preached the gospel that through Jesus, established as ruler and saviour, God gives repentance and remission of sins to Israel (Acts 5:31; cf. 2:38; 3:19; 3:26; 10:43; 13:38; 17:30; 26:20).

¹ Translated from J. Bonsirven, *La Bible Apocryphe*, Paris 1953, p. 28

² cf. T. Worden, 'The Meaning of "Sin"', *Scripture* 19 (1957), pp. 44-53

³ *aphesis*, the word used in the expression 'remission of sins.' The corresponding verb, *aphiēmi*, which is so frequently found with 'sin(s)' as its object has a complexity of meaning which makes it very difficult to come to any firm conclusion on the exact significance of the expression *aphienai hamartias*. This text may possibly be one of the clearest indications.

But it is Paul's doctrine of remission of sins through Christ which is of particular significance for our subject, for he shows so insistently the link between sin and death, that crowning evil which sums up, as it were, the sicknesses and the miseries which sinful man must endure. According to Paul, sin ruled men since Adam, as can be seen from the fact that all have died (Rom. 5:12): death is the result of sin, it is the reward which sin gives to them, prefaced by all the misery and ailments of which they were the victims. It is true that they did not recognise the cause of their misery until God revealed Himself. But when God made known His will to men through the Law, promising that if they would observe His commands they would live for ever, freed from all their miseries, they realised that their wretchedness was the result of failing to live according to God's will, the result of sin. Time and again sin had its way with them; when they murdered, when they committed fornication, when they stole, when they lied, they now recognised that such actions were in opposition to God's will (Rom. 5:20); they realised in the light of God's Law that they were ruled by sin, and they never succeeded in conquering the power of sin within them. Even the just man who observed the Law failed to conquer sin; it still clung to him, it still brought death to him. Even Abraham had died. The observance of the Law was the fulfilling of God's will; it did therefore bring its rewards; yet it did not bring that complete fulfilment of God's promises for which they hoped. He had given His promise (Rom. 4:13); He therefore owed it to Himself to realise all the blessing He had pronounced over Abraham. God was supremely reliable, faithful to His every word. But when would He prove that fidelity finally and perfectly? When would He show forth His 'justice': when would He do full justice to His promises¹ and save His people from the afflictions and death which were their lot since sin had obtained its power over them? Many times in the past He had saved them from evils which threatened; many times He had repeated that great act of salvation whereby He delivered them from Egypt. This deliverance had always served as the firm foundation of their hopes. The evils which had threatened them from the Canaanites and the Philistines, the Assyrians and the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Syrians: the whole of their history had been proof that God's promises were not illusory, even though they had failed so frequently to co-operate in the conquest of sin which caused such evils. They had richly deserved the delay; but it remained true that however much they did co-operate, complete conquest of sin could not be achieved by anyone but God alone. Even the just man to whom the Law meant everything could

¹ cf. S. Lyonnet, *De 'Iustitia Dei' in Epistola ad Romanos*, Romae 1947

do no more than await God's hour, when all sin would be dismissed, when misery, persecution, labour and that greatest horror of all, death, would be destroyed.

In his efforts to describe the change which the coming of Christ has made, Paul's comments on the Law seem so derogatory as to suggest that he did not believe the Law was the revelation of God's will. But it is impossible to describe this momentous change in human language; it is also impossible to believe that Paul actually denies the divine revelation of the Law, or the part it has played in the history of salvation. But he affirms that now, at last, that is accomplished which was never accomplished during the time of the Law: sin has been destroyed, death has been taken away. Sin had entered the world through Adam, and all men had died since Adam, even though they did not sin as Adam sinned (Rom. 5:14). Here was the mystery: as a result of one man's sin all suffered death. But the mystery of death as it had reigned from Adam to Moses was to some extent explained when the Law intervened, for in its light men saw their actions to be sinful, earning death. They then learned that the actions to which they were prone were actions against the will of God. 'Until the Law there was sin in the world, but sin was not imputed when there was no Law' (Rom. 5:13). When they had received the Law they realised that it was sin, not God, that ruled their lives. By comparison sin had been dead, previous to the Law (Rom. 7:8), for now so many actions previously done in ignorance were no longer to be disguised; what they might previously have taken as nothing more than the dictates of their nature were now recognised as the imperious demands of sin ruling within them. Faced with that fact they became the willing slaves of sin, for they offered their services knowing what they were about: 'Do you not know that in offering yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you become the slaves of the master whom you obey, either of sin unto death, or of obedience unto justice?' (Rom. 6:16). Death was no longer so mysterious: it was the inevitable reward of their slavery. Sin made use of God's Law to display its power and to exact a conscious service. The Law itself was certainly not sin (Rom. 7:7), but it revealed sin to man and thus enhanced sin's power; it became very much alive when the Law was given, and the result was that the Law, destined to give life, in reality led men to death, for sin made use of it to seduce and kill. Sin had brought death even before the Law, but it now scored the far greater triumph of bringing death in spite of men's struggles, in spite of the fact that they knew whence death came. The Law had taught them what they wished to do, but they could not do it: 'In truth I do not understand what I do; I do not do what I wish, but do what I hate . . . in truth

it is no longer I who accomplish the actions, but sin, which lives in me' (Rom. 7:16-17). 'Wretched man that I am! Who will free me from this body which vows me to death?' (Rom. 7:24).

Many readers of these difficult chapters in the Epistle to the Romans will consistently qualify the word 'death' with such words as 'spiritual' or 'of the soul' as they read. Was the omission of some such qualification just carelessness on Paul's part, or might he expect his readers to take it for granted? He did not mean such a qualification to be taken for granted at all. Evidently the church at Corinth did not take for granted the fact that there should be sickness and death among them so soon after becoming Christians; Paul did not take it for granted either, since he points out there is a special reason for it: they have been partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily, and 'That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have fallen asleep' (1 Cor. 11:30). The sad fact was already emerging that even those who through Baptism had died to sin, could fall into sin again, just as the sad fact is with us that to this day Christians fall asleep in a manner so similar to universal death, that when Paul asserts that death has been conquered there are many who must make him speak of 'spiritual death' lest he should have been proved false. Yet to allow the great Christian paradox to influence our understanding of Paul's teaching will not solve that paradox, for the Christian is still in danger of 'spiritual death,' in spite of Paul's insistence that death has been swallowed up in victory. 'If we are dead to sin, how is it possible to continue to live in it?' (Rom. 6:2). When therefore Paul speaks of death it is not right to restrict his meaning. Death is the final end,¹ the final destruction of man, body and soul together; if it be permitted to enlarge on Paul's meaning it is only for the sake of including within it the human miseries and afflictions which are a foretaste of death. Paul speaks of Abraham's old age as death (Rom. 4:19), and there are other afflictions, such as blindness, lameness, leprosy, deafness, poverty (cf. Matt. 11:5). Death was present in life from the first day of a man's existence, 'For in sin my mother conceived me' (Ps. 51:7; Heb. 2:15; Rom. 8:15). The very uncertainty of life was one of the greatest triumphs of death: 'The sadness of the world produces death' (2 Cor. 7:10). The hand of death touched everything man did (cf. Heb. 9:14). In fact, all who did not follow Christ were dead whilst still living (cf. Matt. 8:22;

¹ Death, as Paul speaks of it here, is death as understood by the Jew, before it was destroyed by Christ: it is the Old Testament idea of Death: 'Death is the final separation from God. In Sheol they do not praise Yahweh,' A.-M. Dubarle, 'La condition humaine dans l'Ancien Testament,' *Revue Biblique*, 1956, p. 325. This article, of which I was not able to make use in discussing the Old Testament conception of sin, deals with that question admirably.

1 John 3:14; John 5:21, 25). 'The wicked are dead, even during their life' (Berakoth, 18b).¹ Death has a wider meaning, indeed, than the end of physical existence upon this earth, and it is never a 'natural occurrence,'² once God revealed that everlasting life was the reward which He offered, not only for his chosen people as a people, but for each chosen individual. But it never concerns the soul exclusively, since the revelation would have been speaking in riddles if it had cleaved man into a body and soul as though they were quite separate parts—belief in the resurrection of the body is no accidental or superfluous element of the Christian Faith.

It is because of the intimate relation between sin and death that sin was conquered and death destroyed through the death and resurrection of Christ. In him God made the final assault, and through him the final victory was won. Christ's death bore the external resemblance of sin's usual victory: so much so that St Paul could speak of Our Lord having been made sin (2 Cor. 5:21). In Christ God as it were beat sin at its own game, for sin was given every chance with Christ. Although the sinless Son of God was outside the power of sin, he nevertheless took flesh, and submitted that flesh to the treatment sin usually metes out to man: he allowed his body to be afflicted by hunger and fatigue; to be beaten with whips, and even crucified. Death would seem to have triumphed. But he rose again, and Paul could say: 'O death, where is thy victory?' (1 Cor. 15:55). God chose to redeem us in a manner which underlined the power of sin most vividly. Could there have been a more convincing way of proving to man that sin had been conquered and death destroyed? All the powers of sin and its final onslaught, death, had failed. Christ, the first-born from the dead (Col. 1:18) is the living proof that God had finally and perfectly fulfilled His promise to free men from evil. Those promises which had fed the hope of His chosen people for hundreds of years, and of which He had on so many occasions given partial proof, were now completed. And just as sin had won its mastery over mankind through the one man, Adam, so now mankind had mastered sin through the one man, Christ.

But how could men share in the victory of Christ? They had shared in Adam's defeat by sharing in his nature, by being born of Adam, by being in a real sense so many adams. To share in Christ's victory, then, men must become so many christs. It now becomes true to say of man that as Adam he is doomed to death, but as Christ he has triumphed over death. To this day there is no victory over sin unless a man become Christ; only through Christ is there remission

¹ Quoted in C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, II, Paris 1953, p. 147

² cf. Bultmann, *Theol. Wört.*, III, p. 14

of sins. It is so easy to be part of Adam : everyone born into this world is adam. But for the remission of sin he must be born a christ.

2 *Remission of sins through Baptism* 'For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ' (Gal. 3:27). It is the constant teaching of St Paul that through Baptism we become part of the body of Christ, and thereby die to sin (cf. Rom. 6:3-7). And from the beginning both the power of Christ and the reception of Baptism had been proclaimed as the means whereby sin would be destroyed. When St Peter had finished the first Apostolic preaching of the Gospel his hearers had asked what they must do, and he had replied : 'Repent and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins' (Acts 2:38). If remission of sins is to be obtained through Christ (cf. Col. 1:14 ; Ephes. 1:7) then in practice we share Christ's victory over sin by Baptism, which destroys sin and gives us a new life, a sinless life. The remission of sins is therefore essentially and primarily through the Sacrament of Baptism. It is impossible to treat of the nature and effects of Baptism here,¹ but it is vital to remember the part played by Baptism in the remission of sins if we are to understand the dilemma which faced the early Church, the doubts and the difficulties which arose, and the way in which the Church came to the complete realisation of the full import of the power which Christ had given to his apostles.

The New Testament teaches that through our sharing by Baptism in Christ's final victory, we are essentially freed from all sin, we are new creatures, we are members of God's kingdom, we are saved. Suffice it to wait for the coming of the Lord when there will be the new heavens and the new earth. Since the remission of sins is essentially through the Sacrament of Baptism, then essentially there is no call for any further remission : the baptised are sinless. The emphasis of the New Testament is naturally upon the final break with sin through Baptism, and therefore the very real, but in a certain sense accidental possibility of Christians falling back into sin during their time of waiting is less explicitly considered. There is, indeed, no question of this possibility being either denied or wholly ignored by the New Testament. St Paul realised that in spite of the death to sin which is brought about by Baptism, sin is not yet wholly destroyed, and that there is danger of sin among the saints who form the body of Christ ; and St Peter warns his readers : 'Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour' (1 Pet. 5:8). Yet we may ask why the Church when faced with the problem of the lapsed Christians found any

¹ cf. D. M. Stanley, 'Baptism in the New Testament,' *Scripture*, VIII (1956), pp. 44-57

difficulty in solving it. Many would consider the teaching of St Paul to be quite explicit and quite clear, not only on the possibility of forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism, but also on the precise way in which this remission is to be accomplished.

3 *Remission of sins committed after Baptism* The degree of clarity may, however, be questioned, and thus the doubts of some of the earlier Christian writers viewed more indulgently. Does St Paul deal explicitly with the situation in which the baptised Christian has so sinned that he is cut off from the body, and does he explicitly state how such a sinner is to be readmitted to the body for the forgiveness of his sin? In 2 Thess. 3:14 the brethren are advised not to associate intimately¹ with anyone who does not obey Paul's instructions. They are to avoid him in order to shame him, and they are not to treat him as an enemy, but reprove him as a brother. In 2 Cor. 2:5-11 Paul speaks of someone whom they have now punished sufficiently, for an offence which is unknown to us, and whom they should now forgive and console lest he drown in grief. But these examples hardly suggest cases of such grievous sin that the offender is completely cut off from the body, and therefore stands in need of readmission. Paul does not call their offences 'sins,' and there is no clear teaching about readmission to the body of Christ. But we have a clearer example in 2 Cor. 12:21, where Paul envisages the possibility that if he goes to Corinth he will grieve many² of those who have previously sinned and who did not repent for the impurity they had done. If, as seems certain, Paul is referring to sinners among the Christian community, then he recognises here, not only the possibility of grievous sin among Christians, but also their repentance, and the forgiveness of their sins. He does not mention, however, what means they will use in order to secure forgiveness.

In 1 Cor. 5:1-5 St Paul deals with a case of incest among the brethren. A member of the church at Corinth has taken for himself the wife of his father. Whether it was a putative marriage or simply concubinage matters little; the woman was the man's stepmother, and such a union was forbidden by the Law and was punishable with stoning (Lev. 18:8). This was an act of impurity abhorred even by pagans, as Cicero shows when he refers to Sessia's marriage with her son-in-law Melinus, and it would lose none of its wickedness if the woman were no longer the wife of the sinner's father at the time this union took place.³ But Paul's indignation is really directed against the

¹ The same word is used of association with the impure, in 1 Cor. 5:9.

² Or 'grieve over many,' cf. *Bible de Jérusalem, ad. vers.*

³ cf. Robertson & Plummer, *Corinthians I.*

church at Corinth for allowing such a man to remain one of their number. He therefore decrees, though he cannot be actually present, that they gather together, and in union with him present in spirit, hand over the offender to Satan 'for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.' This is commonly interpreted to mean that the handing over of the sinner to Satan is for the destruction of the sinner's flesh, and the final salvation of the sinner's spirit. In other words Paul gives instructions for the excommunication of the incestuous man: he must be removed from the midst of the Corinthian church, and thereby cut off from the body of Christ; but this excommunication would not imply final damnation since he may be saved on the day of the Lord. Thus Paul would here teach the possibility of forgiveness of sin committed after Baptism, and the means would be the handing over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. This latter phrase has caused great difficulty to commentators. Many understand it as the mortification of the flesh at the hand of Satan, a punishment which would last for a time, but which would leave the opportunity for reconciliation with the Church after due penance had been done. But others point out that *olethros* implies something more violent than what is implied by the word 'mortification,'¹ and that it signifies not only physical affliction but complete destruction.² Nevertheless it is difficult to believe that Paul would envisage the salvation of a man who died outside the body of Christ, and we must either understand 'destruction of the flesh' as a punishment which is not fatal, and which gives the sinner the opportunity of reconciliation with the Church, or we must consider the possibility of a different interpretation of the text altogether.

There are good reasons for thinking that Paul is here concerned entirely with the good of the community, the body of Christ, which in spite of Baptism is still in danger of corruption. It is part of Paul's general teaching that the body's weakness arises from the flesh: the body in so far as it is weak and corruptible is 'flesh,'³ whilst in its incorruptible aspect it is 'spirit.' By Baptism we die to the flesh and live to the spirit. That is the ideal; in practice the body of Christ shows signs of still being to some extent 'flesh.' In this particular instance we have a member of the body falling into grievous sin.

¹ 'Renan, Godet and Goudge regard the expression as meaning sentence of death by a wasting sickness.' *Op. cit.*, p. 99., *ftn.*

² *cf. Theol. Wört., sub voce.* Other examples of the use of this word support this interpretation, *cf.* 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:9; 1 Tim. 6:9.

³ But the mention of Satan as the agent of this destruction, prevents us from understanding 'flesh' as the individual's sinfulness; in such an interpretation Satan would be the direct instrument of this sinner's justification.

He is still in the midst of the body ; he will, if left there, corrupt the whole body. It is therefore necessary to excommunicate him, which is equivalent to handing him over to Satan, in order to destroy the 'flesh' which has again shown itself in the body of Christ. If this is done, then the genuine body of Christ, which is 'spirit' will be saved on the day of the Lord. This interpretation fits in well with the context, for Paul continues to speak of the corrupting influence of sin upon the body, using the metaphor of the leaven. The terms flesh and spirit are replaced by leaven and new dough. There is only one lump of dough, that is one body of Christians, just as there is only one loaf (1 Cor. 10:17). The destruction of the leaven, therefore, is for the sake of the one lump of unleavened dough, the Church, and not for the sake of the individual Christian. They are, each one of them, 'unleavened,' but only as members of the one body. The leaven which they must get rid of is the corrupting influence within the Church : in this instance the incestuous man whom they have allowed to remain in their midst. In such a context the 'flesh' to be handed over to Satan for destruction may be compared to the leaven which must be purged, and the 'spirit' to the new dough.

This interpretation supposes that Paul could speak of the body of Christ, in its essentially incorruptible aspect, as 'the spirit,' when compared with its accidentally corruptible aspect in the present world, which he calls 'the flesh.' The antithesis spirit and flesh, in the sense of the incorruptible person (both body and soul) as distinct from the corruptible, is common enough in reference to Christians. Before Baptism we were 'in the flesh'; but now we are 'in newness of spirit' (Rom. 7:5-6), and we walk now, not according to flesh but according to spirit (Rom. 8:4). 'You are not in flesh but in spirit, if God's spirit dwells in you' (8:8). The spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in us (8:10). The spirit comes to the aid of our weakness (8:26). We, as baptised Christians, live by the spirit ; we are guided and strengthened by Him ; we have the first-fruits of the spirit ; the spirit is our essential characteristic. But the spirit is not regarded primarily as possessed by each individual for himself ; the spirit is one. In 1 Cor. 12:4 ff. Paul insists that the various charisms are all due to one and the same spirit, just as a physical body is one, though it is composed of many limbs ; the body of Christ, composed of many members, is one. In one spirit we were baptised into one body (1 Cor. 12:13) ; we are the body of Christ because God has sent into our hearts the spirit of His son (Gal. 4:6). We are 'one body, one spirit' (Ephes. 4:4). Paul's use of 'the spirit' for the body of Christ is unusual enough, but it is called forth by the antithesis with 'flesh.' To speak of the destruction of the *flesh* in order that the *body*

may be saved, would perhaps have been a paradox too jarring even for Paul. But in any case, it does seem significant that in other instances where there is question of at least the possibility of offences among the brethren, such offences are said to be against the spirit, or in other words, to endanger the spirit in some way. Paul urged the Ephesians to preserve the unity of the spirit by the bond of peace: one body and one spirit (4:3). Any kind of injury to our fellow-members grieves the holy spirit of God by whom we have been sealed for the day of deliverance; lack of fraternal charity injures the spirit which is the life-giving power of God, His Spirit. In 1 Thess. 5:12-22 Paul exhorts them not to offend one another, but to show fraternal charity in all things; and he ends by telling them not to quench the spirit, and not to depreciate prophecies. Here the spirit may perhaps be limited to the source of prophetic inspiration; yet this one spirit within the Church may be harmed, even in its prophetic manifestations, by offences against fraternal charity. Whilst therefore we admit that the actual turn of phrase is difficult, this interpretation seems preferable, mainly because of the context, and also because it offers a more acceptable meaning for the word 'destruction.' The opening verses of this pericope make it clear that Paul's preoccupation is with the community rather than the individual sinner; the verses which follow are obviously concerned with preserving the community from corruption through contact with a sinful member. But if this interpretation be correct we are deprived of the clearest example in the New Testament of how the individual sinful Christian is to be saved from the effects of his sin.

Yet this question grew more and more pressing. An increasing number of Christians who had been washed, sanctified, and justified (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11), and who were dead to sin, unfortunately fell into grievous sin once more. These sinners, particularly in time of persecution, fell away from the Body of Christ, and their Baptism seemed as it were annulled. But they sought readmission, they sought forgiveness of their sin and reinstatement in the Kingdom of God. Was this possible? There was ample witness in the Scriptures that God willed not the death of the sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live, and God's mercy and compassionate forgiveness became increasingly emphasised. But how was the Church to dispense the mercy of God? By what means was the sinner to be readmitted into the Body of Christ for the forgiveness of sin? Was there any way of reiterating this effect of Baptism? There was no doubt concerning the impossibility of any repetition of the Sacrament of Baptism. Was then, the power of forgiving sins given to the Apostles when they were sent to make disciples of all nations and baptise them

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be frustrated by sin ?

(To be concluded)

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THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC (GEN. 22)

The sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22) is not included among the passages most frequently discussed in modern literature on Genesis. There are a certain number of difficulties, however, which modern readers sense. They find the picture of God's temptation of Abraham to sacrifice his only son repulsive.¹ The horror which human sacrifice excites makes it hard for them to see how God could utter such a command even when it is not seriously intended, or how Abraham could have accepted such a command as a true divine revelation ; and they find metaphysical evasions based on ' God's supreme dominion over life ' vacuous. H. Junker has written that such a command in modern times would be a sure sign that the alleged revelation was not genuine² ; our modern reader wonders whether our moral and religious world is so different from that of Abraham that this would not be an equally valid sign in the world of Abraham. Or he may wonder whether it is not also a valid sign that such a narrative is certainly not historical. Even if this were admitted, it would not solve his problem ; for he wants to know how the narrative is religiously significant, whether it is historical or not. These questions indicate that an investigation of the literary, historical, and theological character of the passage may be rewarding.

Modern critics almost unanimously attribute the story to the Elohist strand of narrative in the Pentateuch. They hasten to add that they do not thereby imply that the narrative is homogeneous ; indeed, there are some evident signs that it is not. Thus vv. 15-18, in which the ' angel of Yahweh ' addresses Abraham ' a second time,' recapitulating the promises of a great progeny in commonplace terms derived from other passages of Genesis, are with scarcely any doubt

¹ An example of this may be seen in the following extract from a letter to *The Sunday Times* of 28 October 1956 : ' The other day my granddaughter, aged nine, was told in school the story of Abraham and Isaac, and how " God had told Abraham to sacrifice his son." Surely no-one believes this barbarous doctrine nowadays ? I assured her that God never asked or told anyone to make such a sacrifice, but that in olden times priests had preached that doctrine.'—Ed.

² H. Junker, ' Die Opferung Isaaks,' *Pastor Bonus*, LII (1941), p. 29

a supplement to the original narrative. This passage does not, however, suggest that the author of our Pentateuch has suppressed another account of the sacrifice of Abraham. Although the 'angel of Yahweh' addresses Abraham in vv. 11 and 18, God Himself ('*lôhim*') speaks to Abraham in v. 1 ff. The place of the sacrifice is called by Abraham 'Yahweh will provide' (Yahweh will see) in v. 14; the second half of the verse, however, calls the place 'on the mountain of Yahweh he will appear,' which should more probably be vocalised to read 'on the mountain Yahweh will appear.' 'Yahweh will provide' is an obvious allusion to v. 8. The place of the sacrifice is called the land of Moriah in v. 2. This name occurs elsewhere only in 2 Chron. 3:1 as the name of the temple mountain in Jerusalem. This solitary witness of the name at a late date does not argue that the title was original. But the ancient versions did not take Moriah as a proper name: Greek, 'high land'; Vulgate, 'land of vision'; Syriac, 'land of the Amorites.' This textual tradition leads M. George to suggest that the name is a late insertion into Genesis¹; but one might also suppose that the appearance of the name in 2 Chron. was due to an effort to connect the site of the temple with Abraham's sacrifice. Modern critics find no evidence whatever for locating Moriah. It is three days' journey from Abraham's residence, which is not mentioned by name. The whole story is locally detached from the Abraham saga. And we ought to observe that it is also temporally detached; it stands alone with no reference to a larger context. It is not unique in this respect; all the stories of Abraham exhibit the signs of their earlier existence as detached anecdotes. But they have been roughly woven together in our Pentateuch; ch. 22, except for vv. 15-18, is not a piece of this fabric. Nevertheless, it seems evident that the compilers of our present Pentateuch intended the story to appear where it does as the climax of the spiritual adventure of Abraham: the supreme test of his faith and submission to God, which he passed triumphantly. The position of the story, however, does not imply that the story had this significance in its original form. The fact that this significance is explicit in vv. 15-18 renders it even more likely that the original story had a different orientation.

From these considerations we see that this episode shares the character of all the Pentateuchal traditions—a character which is not always given its due attention, not only by the general reader, but sometimes by scholars; yet the examination of the literary character of any passage ought to be dominated by the principle that these written accounts record traditions which were once living. As living they

¹ A. George, 'Le sacrifice d'Abraham,' *Études de Critique et d'Histoire Religieuse*, Lyon 1948, p. 102

exhibited the vitality of oral traditions which, to borrow a phrase from M. George, lived and grew with Israel¹; in them later generations found the roots and the foundations of the religion—creed, code, and cult—which existed in their own times. The successive retelling of the traditions gave the story different forms and emphases in different phases of its development. This naively free handling of tradition, in which the users of the tradition were entirely masters of their material, is indicated in the phrase employed by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1948: we are not dealing with history in the classical or modern sense of the word. It should be added that the same vitality often appears in the New Testament use of the Old Testament; thus the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews finds that the story illustrates the heroic faith of Abraham (Heb. 11:17–20), and St Paul borrows a phrase from the passage to say that God has not spared His only begotten Son (Rom. 8:32; Gen. 22:16). The New Testament writers also were masters of their material, and in applying the Old Testament to the Christian fact were not restricted by the necessity of investigating the original form and purpose of the story. This we can now do, and we ought to do it.

The literary character of the story is inextricably connected with its theological character. M. George, in what is perhaps the best modern study of the passage, has stated a triple purpose of the story, and we may assume for the moment that this triple purpose represents three phases of its development. The first of these M. George calls 'topographical': it is the story of the theophany at a sanctuary whose name has been lost, as we have indicated above.² In ancient Israelite traditions almost every sanctuary of which we have any information has such a theophany tradition attached to it; the theophany designated the place as sacred, a place where Yahweh had appeared and thus indicated His readiness to receive supplication: cf. Mamre (Gen. 18:1 ff.); Beersheba (Gen. 26:24); Bethel (Gen. 28:13); Gilgal (Joshua 5:2, 9); Jerusalem (2 Sam. 24:16). This consideration suggests that 'on the mountain Yahweh will appear' is more probably the original name of the sanctuary, and that this name had no connection with Abraham's sacrifice. 'Yahweh will provide' is a secondary interpretation of the name derived from the sacrifice of Abraham.

The second of the three purposes suggested by M. George is 'liturgical': the author wished to condemn the sacrifice of children and to base the custom of redemption upon divine revelation.³ Human sacrifice is frequently alluded to in the Old Testament as a Canaanite practice; cf. Deut. 12:31; 2 Kings 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; Micah 6:7:

¹ George, *op. cit.*, p. 99

² George, *op. cit.*, pp. 101 ff.

³ George, *op. cit.*, pp. 105 ff.

Jer. 2:13, 7:31, 19:5; Ezek. 23:37. This practice is not well attested by extra-Biblical evidence for the period of the Hebrew monarchy, but there is no reason to doubt the Hebrew affirmation. Hebrew religion rejected this abomination; with other ancient Semitic peoples the Hebrews believed that the first-born belonged to the deity, but the first-born was offered to Yahweh and redeemed from sacrifice by the payment of a ransom (cf. Exod. 22:29, 13:13, 34:19-20). The liturgical rejection of the offering of the first-born, symbolised by the rite of redemption, is also dramatised by the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. Indeed, it is not impossible that the story of the sacrifice of Isaac had a liturgical function; its recitation could form part of the rite of redemption. In the words of M. George, the narrator makes of Abraham's 'generous and savage act' a temptation; but Yahweh rejects such generosity. The tradition explained the redemption of the first-born as due to a revelation made to their ancestor when he, under the influence of Canaanite superstition, thought that his god also desired the sacrifice of the first-born. The actual rite of substitution is found in Gen. 22:13. M. George suggests that 22:12, which he finds parallel to such passages as 1 Sam. 15:22 and Micah 6:6-8, is a further development of the same theme by the Elohist. A prophetic lesson, affirming the primacy of the spiritual sacrifice of obedience and submission, is derived from the story; this was probably not included in its original form.

The third purpose is 'hagiographical': it comes from the author of the Pentateuch as we have it and is derived from its position in the context. As M. George describes it, this purpose exhibits the event as the great climactic crisis in the life of Abraham, 'which precedes the realisation of the promises and elicits supreme faith and pure hope.'¹

G. von Rad also has pointed out the dual significance of the story in itself and in its present context; there is no single basic thought, but several. M. Chaine found two great ideas in the story: the greatness of Abraham's faith and the rejection of human sacrifice. His faith is compared by Chaine with the faith of Job; there can be little doubt that Job, who is modelled after Abraham in his external manner of life, also imitates him in his renunciation (Job 1:21, 2:10). A multiple motif in the story is also noticed by de Vaux, Vawter, Vaccari and Junker.² Hence we may take this as a generally accepted conclusion of modern exegetes; it is a little more difficult to determine which motif is to be regarded as primary—that is, both in the logical

¹ George, *op. cit.*, p. 109

² G. von Rad, *1 Buch Mose 12*, 10-25, 18 (ATD), Göttingen 1952, pp. 203, 208; J. Chaine, *Le livre de Genèse*, Paris 1948, p. 270; R. de Vaux, *Le Genèse* (BJ), Paris 1953, ad loc.; Bruce Vawter, *A Path Through Genesis*, New York 1956, ad loc.; A. Vaccari, *La Sacra Bibbia*, Florence 1942, I, p. 104; H. Junker, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 ff.

and in the temporal order, the motif which was proper to the original form of the story and from which the other motifs are derived.

We have seen that the motif of Abraham's faith and obedience depends both on the position of the story in the context and upon vv. 15-18, which are the first exegetical comment upon the story; hence this motif, which appears in the New Testament use of the passage and which is most frequently employed in modern homiletic use, is the latest in the development of the story. We are then left with the sanctuary motif and with the rejection of human sacrifice. Von Rad believes that the sanctuary motif is the original motif, and M. George seems to share this view¹; but M. Chaine omitted it from consideration. One may contrast this account with the theophany of Bethel (Gen. 28:11 ff.). In the Bethel story the sanctuary motif is obviously primary; Bethel is recognised as a holy place, 'fearful, the house of God and the gate of heaven'; for Yahweh is in the place (28:17-18), and the story has no other point. Here, as we have seen, the original form of the name of the sanctuary exhibits no connection with the story of the sacrifice of Isaac; and the story will stand if the sanctuary motif is omitted altogether. We are then reduced to the liturgical function of the story.

The thought occurs immediately that the story, in this hypothesis, is not among the oldest patriarchal traditions. We cannot date the origin of the practice of redemption, and there is no reason to doubt that it was ancient. But the prophetic passages in which the question is urgent all belong to the eighth century and later; and the framing of this story so as to present this lesson falls easily into the same period, although this date has only the merit of conjecture. This conjecture does not imply that the practice of redeeming the first-born was also of recent origin; but we can deduce from the prophetic passages that there was in this period a problem of justifying the practice of redemption. One can only say that our story fits this theological pattern. It is a dramatisation of the liturgical practice of redemption, basing it upon the oldest traditions of Israel and ultimately upon the religious experience of their patriarchal ancestor. Obviously we are not here dealing with history in the modern sense of the word, but with the creation of a narrative from existing traditions and liturgical practices. On the other hand, such use of traditional material is not unusual in the Old Testament, as we now know from recent studies. The story exhibits a concept of God which is extremely anthropomorphic and not very mature; and this is the concept which we find in all such Israelite creations. At the same time, this concept is the base of such spiritual and theological applications as we find in the

¹ Von Rad, *op. cit.*, p. 208

A SHORT NOTE ON DANIEL 12:11-12

Elohistic account, in its position in the context of the Pentateuch, and in its use in the New Testament. Modern readers may find the story religiously more significant and less difficult if they understand what its writers were trying to do and how they employed the materials which were available to them.

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A SHORT NOTE ON DANIEL 12:11-12

The two periods mentioned in Dan. 12:11-12 differ by 45 days.

Many scholars think that Dan. 8:14 refers to 2,300 evenings and mornings, meaning 1,150 days, and that it may refer to Antiochus's desecration of the Temple.

The abomination of desolation was set up in the Temple on 15 Casleu of the 145th year of the Seleucid era (1 Mac. 1:54). Pagan sacrifices started in the Temple on 25 Casleu of the same year (1 Mac. 1:59). The Temple was rededicated on 25 Casleu of the year 148 (1 Mac. 4:52-4), that is 3 years 10 days, or 1,105 days, after the abomination was set up. This differs from the 1,150 days of Dan. 8:14 by 45 days.

Although the Temple was rededicated after 1,105 days, perhaps the religious persecution did not finally cease till an extra 45 days had elapsed. This may be the same period as that referred to in Dan. 12:11-12.

In this case, the following will be the dates of certain events (years being reckoned as in 1 Mac.):

In June 145 (185 days before 15 Casleu), Antiochus's decree forbidding sacrifices (1 Mac. 1:45).

In Dec. 145, on 15 Casleu, abomination set up in Temple.

In Dec. 145, on 25 Casleu, pagan sacrifices started in Temple.

In Dec. 148, on 25 Casleu, rededication. This would be 1,290 days after the decree of June 145 (see Dan. 12:11).

45 days later, persecution definitely ceases. This would probably not be the date of Antiochus's death, for this took place in 149 (1 Mac. 6:16) and the new year probably did not begin until the spring. Before his death Antiochus did officially cease persecuting the Jews (2 Mac. 9, especially verses 10-17). This was during his illness which took place after the rededication (see 1 Mac. 6:7-8). It could therefore be 45 days after the rededication, in which case it

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would be 1,150 days after the setting up of the abomination (see Dan. 8:14) and 1,335 days after the decree of June 145 (see Dan. 12:12).

Incidentally, either of the periods mentioned in Dan. 12:11-12 could be the same as the $3\frac{1}{2}$ years hinted at in Dan. 7:25 and 12:7 (if 'time' means 'year'), and in Dan. 9:27 (if 'week' means '7 years').

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QUESTION AND ANSWER

BIBLICAL INERRANCY AND GALILEO

Leo XIII in his encyclical Providentissimus Deus stated that the sacred writers 'did not wish to teach men these truths (that is to say, the inner constitution of visible objects) which would not help any to salvation,' and hence we always insist that the Bible cannot be convicted of formal error in respect of the apparently scientific facts it contains. Why then did the theologians condemn Galileo ?

The simple answer would be that *Providentissimus Deus* was written in 1893 whilst Galileo was condemned in 1633 and that the seventeenth-century theologians were ignorant of the important principle here laid down by the nineteenth-century pope. But to give merely this simple answer would probably create an unjust impression, and in any case the unhappy incident provides a valuable illustration of the constant need for realising the precise import of the truths of faith, when faced by new circumstances.

Three years before the opening of the Council of Trent Copernicus had died as an honoured son of the Church. But he had sowed the seeds of knowledge which in the seventeenth century was to come into conflict with the theologians, a conflict culminating in the condemnation of Galileo. The Ptolemaic system of Astronomy had been unchallenged, a system in which the earth was at the centre of the universe, and around it there revolved in successive order the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and the fixed stars. But Copernicus had rejected this geocentric system in favour of the solar system, and it was under the influence of Galileo and Kepler that the majority of astronomers accepted it. The invention of the telescope at the beginning of this century facilitated the making of observations, and in 1611 Galileo was exhibiting the wonders of the heavens, under papal patronage in the gardens of the Quirinal palace.

But this solar system soon met with strong opposition from the theologians, who saw in it a threat to the teaching of the Bible. In 1616 the following propositions were placed before the theologians of the Inquisition : that the sun is the centre of the universe and is immobile ; and that the earth is not the centre of the universe and has both translateral and rotating movement. They came to the following decisions : that the first proposition is philosophically false and absurd ; moreover it is formally heretical, because it contradicts expressly several texts of the Holy Scriptures, according to their proper sense and following the common interpretation of the Fathers and Doctors ; and that the second proposition deserves censure from the philosophical point of view ; from the theological it is at least erroneous.

The affair of Galileo is important and instructive only in so far as it gives us clear insight into the delicate situation that can arise between theology and the sciences. Unfortunately it has in the past been used as a weapon in anti-Catholic apologetic, although, as a matter of fact, the Copernican system had been violently attacked by Luther and Melancthon at the very time when Clement VII was showing himself rather favourable to it ! Such a polemic atmosphere did not lend itself to a calm appraisal of the circumstances, and so the positive lesson was not easily drawn from this incident. But we are now in a more fortunate position, and what interests us is to try to understand why the theologians of the time were disturbed by this system. Being no better instructed in astronomy than any of their contemporaries they could not help but be disturbed. Their faith taught them that the inhabitants of this earth were the crowning glory of God's creation, and that they had been redeemed by the coming of God made man upon this earth. Plainly then, the earth must be the centre of God's universe, and the other planets its adornment. In the account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis, the firmament of heaven was made to serve as a canopy for the earth, and the sun, moon and stars as lamps for its benefit. But any vague feelings of dismay they might have had at seeing the dignity of the earth reduced, were turned into positive and confident opposition by a consideration of Biblical texts which stated the contrary quite clearly : ' The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises ' (Sir. 1:5) ; ' Thou didst set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be shaken ' (Ps. 104:5 ; cf. 18:7 ; 19:4-5), and of course, there was the occasion when, through the miraculous intervention of God on Josue's behalf, ' the sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day ' (Jos. 10:12).

Biblical and consequently theological language had been linked

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with the ancient astronomy for a thousand years, and there had been no reason to distinguish between theological truths and the traditional terms in which those truths were conveyed. The appearance of the Copernican system provided the reason, and indeed demanded such a distinction ; but it would be most unreasonable to expect that this should be realised immediately. Individuals indeed were remarkably quick to see the implications ; thus for instance, St Robert Bellarmine in 1615, wrote to Foscarini who had written a book trying to interpret the Biblical texts in accordance with the Copernican system : ' I say that if there is a true demonstration that the earth turns, then it will be necessary to show a great deal of circumspection in explaining the passages of Scripture which appear to contradict it, and to say that we do not understand them, rather than to say that what has been demonstrated is false.' But this degree of perception was naturally not shared by the majority. The theologians who condemned Galileo were right to maintain the truth of faith that the Bible, being the inspired word of God, can teach no error ; they were wrong in concluding that the Bible taught the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, and it was this error which led them to condemn Galileo. But it would be unjust and unreasonable to be amazed that they should make such an error. In discussing the nature of Biblical inspiration and the resulting inerrancy, the impression is sometimes created that our modern teaching on these questions follows quite obviously from the principles. This is not true, and we ought always to insist on the important part that historical circumstances and positive discoveries in the sciences have played in helping us to arrive at a clearer realisation of all that our belief in inspiration implies, and indeed, all that it does not imply. The treasures of God's revealed truths are only gradually appreciated in all their richness and the Church increases Her appreciation by laborious efforts, which are stimulated and greatly assisted by the difficulties which She is called upon to face. The Galileo incident may well serve to mark the beginning of a long period which proved so fruitful in the growth of this appreciation, precisely because it marked the beginning of a period when the rapid development of the sciences presented so many difficulties of this kind. And perhaps the truth of faith which profited more than any other as a result of this period is the inspiration of the Scriptures.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judaeo-Christian Studies, ed. by John M. Oesterreicher. Pantheon Books, New York. Vol. I, 1955, pp. 349; Vol. II, 1956-57, pp. 357. \$3.95 each.

No-one can study the Old Testament (still less the New) without eventually becoming aware of the Jewish problem. It is true that Israel did not fail in her vocation: it was achieved, as it had always been achieved throughout her history, in the true inner Israel, which is the Church of Christ. Yet where at other times the salvation of this kernel saw the disappearance of the 'outer shell,' in this case Israel has continued to survive as a distinct and apparently inextinguishable people. A mere phenomenon of history or part of a divine plan? St Paul expressed the hope that a holy jealousy would eventually attract Israel to the Church that has inherited the promises made to her (Rom. 11:11 ff.); in fact centuries of prejudice on both sides have only widened the chasm between them.

Prejudice can only be dispelled by understanding and love. The aim of this series is to serve the dialogue between Christian and Jew by helping them to understand each other and in that understanding deepen their love. The Editor's net has been cast widely, and the essays he has collected cover every possible field— theological, philosophical, historical, literary, artistic, sociological—where the basis of such a *rapprochement* may be found. A summary of the articles contained in these volumes will suggest the lines of approach.

The first volume begins with Raïssa Maritain's 'Abraham and the Ascent of Conscience' (pp. 23-52), a revision and translation of her 1947 study on the Patriarch in the light of his imperfect notions. God's education of man, even of his moral sense, was slow and patient. The Exodus (pp. 53-74) receives a masterly treatment by Fr B. Ahern, C.P., who shows how the events that made up this turning-point in Israel's history burned deep into her conscience, to become the subject of her meditation and the basis of her hope. The Gospel of St Matthew and even more that of St John take up the theme to present the work of Christ as the fulfilment of that hope and to point forward to the Christian Sacraments as a sharing in that exodus of Christ. The Abbot of Downside has contributed a study of the Gospel according to Matthew (pp. 75-95) and its particularly Israelite atmosphere. The Sermon on the Mount especially, far from abrogating the old Torah, brings to light its real spirit and reaffirms it in a new and

higher synthesis. A brilliant essay by C. and I. Süssman on the contemporary Jewish painter Marc Chagall (pp. 96-117) finds in his frequent repetition of the themes of the ladder and Christ's crucifixion, a symbol of the yearning for a return to the Christ whom, since New Testament times, Judaism has scarcely had a chance to encounter. Four reproductions of Chagall's crucifixions illustrate the article. The Editor himself discusses 'The Enigma of Simone Weil' (pp. 118-58), whose strange philosophy of negation and despair has been ecstatically hailed as 'Christianity in a sense that can hardly yet be grasped.' Fr Oesterreicher is more cautious, and his searching analysis of her writings forces him to conclude that she was far from being even on the threshold of the Church, whose authority irritated her and against whose Israelite antecedents she was so strangely vehement. (English translations of her work have presented a false picture by omitting her passionate anti-Semitic outbursts.) An essay written by the late Fr P. Charles, S.J. in 1938, when hatred of Judaism was at its highest, is here translated to present his full *exposé* of the so-called 'Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion' (pp. 159-88), which purported to be the minutes of the Zionist Congress of 1897 and its plans for world domination, and enjoyed growing publicity into the 1930s. The publication is shown to have been a clumsy plagiarism of a nineteenth-century satire on the Second Empire, and its readers the victims of a malicious hoax. The Biblical theologian Fr B. Hessler, O.F.M. presents a study of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) (pp. 191-203), and sees in it a protest against the philosophical thought of the last centuries B.C. In its conclusion that no human system can solve life's mysteries it stretches out a hand to the New Testament. The Editor, who elsewhere gives evidence of a fine command of English, has clearly experienced great difficulties in translating the cumbersome German of this study. Fr R. Kugelman, C.P. analyses the use of the words 'Hebrew, Israelite and Jew' (pp. 204-24) and of the overtones they carry, especially in the New Testament. Fr H. Duesberg, O.S.B. is better served by his translator (apart from one howler on p. 234 where Antiochus Epiphanes has become the feast of the Epiphany). His 'Trial of the Messiah' (pp. 225-42) aims to show how the revolution preached by Christ and the opposition he aroused followed the pattern of the divine 'constants' revealed throughout the Old Testament. The Pharisaism which put him to death will always continue, as strongly outside Judaism as inside. Mth Thaddea de Sion quotes extracts from 'The Jewish Burial Service' (pp. 243-55) to indicate how few of these words could not be prayed by a Christian, and completed by him. A sympathetic study of Abraham Heschel's concept of prayer (pp. 256-65) is contributed by Fr E. Synan, who criticises how-

ever his tendency to exaggerate its metaphysical aspects, and to regard petition as a mere motive of prayer and its answer as a mere incidental. *The Merchant of Venice* has always been an object of discussion: is it an anti-Semitic tract, or a masterful defence of the Jews against their oppressors? Barry Ulanov proposes the fresh view (pp. 266-79) that Shakespeare has been rather subtler than his critics, and in his Shylock has indicted both Christian and Jew. 'It is not Jew who offends so grievously nor Christian who understands so poorly; it is man who is inadequate to his eternal destiny.' 'The Ledger of Death' (pp. 283-91) reveals the frightening statistics which illustrate the Nazi programme for the systematic annihilation of the Jews in Europe (6 million were killed between 1939 and 1945). Fr W. Keller makes a plea that this crime against humanity be recognised for the enormity it was. The last article in this first volume presents the Finaly Case (pp. 292-313), the wrangle between the Catholic foster-mother and the Jewish relatives of the Finaly children, which aroused such emotional excitement in the European press of the early 1950s. Fr E. Flannery offers a clear and reasoned exposition of the facts, to allow a saner assessment of the juridical and theological problems involved.

In what is perhaps the finest essay of this collection, Fr. A. Jones opens the second volume with an analysis (pp. 13-34) of one of those rich Biblical themes which illustrate, far better than any mere apologetic, the lines of force that tie the New Testament to the Old, and make either unintelligible without the other. The Word of God to man in created nature, in the Sinaitic Code, in the Prophets, in the Wisdom of the Sapiential Books, in the Memra of the rabbinical writings, is fully revealed in the Word of St John. 'Israel's future will always lie in following the Word, whatever form it may assume.' Mgr C. Journet contributes by far the longest article in these volumes on 'The Destinies of Israel' (pp. 35-90), a translated digest of his book on the same subject. Under the sub-titles of the 'Israel of Waiting,' the 'Israel of the Spirit' and the 'Israel of the Exile' he deals with the messianic hope, its fulfilment in Christ and the problem raised by a Judaism which failed to recognise him, a problem to which there is no solution on the merely temporal level. In a magnificent final section on the 'Israel of the Ingathering' the author looks to the future saints that the conversion of Israel will produce. The Editor, Fr J. Oesterreicher, makes his contribution to this second volume with a comprehensive summary of the origin, life and ideals of the Qumran Community (pp. 91-134), the discovery of whose literature has revealed a stream of Old Testament spirituality which rabbinical Judaism largely forgot or suppressed. Far from embarrassing the

Christian therefore by seeming to compromise the originality of the New Testament, Qumran throws new light on the intimate bond that ties the Church to the old Israel. Barry Ulanov also returns to analyse the symbolism of the seven Prophets in Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling (pp. 135-59); four of these figures are reproduced to illustrate the article. The Dreyfus case (pp. 160-87) is reassessed by Fr J. Moody in the light of the political conflict and anti-Semitism of late-nineteenth-century France. The extent to which the New Testament as well as the Old requires a re-orientation of the modern mind is illustrated by Fr Q. Lauer's essay on the 'existentialist' frame of Biblical thought (pp. 191-211), which contrasts so strongly with the 'essential' mentality that we have inherited from the Greeks. Mth K. Sullivan, R.S.C.J. gives an outline of the studies that lay behind the 1948 clarification by the Holy See of the meaning of the Good Friday prayer *pro perfidis Judaeis* (pp. 212-23). It is philologically certain that the word carries no moral censure but refers simply to their unbelief. About the accompanying rubric (modified since 1956) there is less agreement, although the commonly accepted explanation is clearly wrong (it was not the Jews but the Roman soldiers who made a mock genuflection to Christ). Some of the riches of the Jewish prayer book (pp. 224-38) are displayed by Mary Bede, who finds in its daily blessings and thanksgivings a pattern of the Christian Eucharist. R. Schoeck inquires into 'Chaucer's Prioress' (pp. 239-55) to find in her description a veiled condemnation of her hypocrisy, a condemnation which covers also the anti-Semitic legend that she relates in her tale. Shortly before he died in 1954 Friedrich Pater wrote a short essay on the company of the beasts in Christ's Temptation (Mark 1:13). The Editor presents a translation of this meditation (pp. 256-67) as a moving testimonial to the Jewish philosopher's final profession of faith in Christ. Fr Flannery's survey in this volume concerns the failure of Evanston (pp. 271-91) to agree on the part played by Israel in Christian hope (the main theme of the 1954 Assembly). He gives the background to the final statement, not in order to take malicious delight in it (a Catholic gathering of scholars might well find itself embarrassed by similar oppositions) but to insist that the issue should have been decided on a Biblical and theological basis, not on the political, social and practical considerations that seem to have swayed opinion at Evanston. Fr Keller continues his study of Anti-Semitism (pp. 292-312), this time in the Soviet Union, where the 1917 revolution began a series of attempts to detach Jews from their ancient loyalties, national, cultural and religious. In spite of Soviet propaganda about Jewish freedom, these attempts seem by now largely to have succeeded.

None of these studies is superficial. Much scholarship has gone

into their making, and above all a wealth of love. If the chasm between Judaism and Christianity is ever to be spanned, it will be by means of such a bridge as is here being constructed. We can only hope that the venture will produce many more such volumes, and that they will receive the wide reading public that they deserve.

H. J. RICHARDS

John L. McKenzie, S.J., *The Two-Edged Sword*. An Interpretation of the Old Testament. The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee 1956. pp. 317. \$4.50.

'Because Catholics have felt no need to read the book, and because the book repelled them even if they tried to read it, Catholics have left the Old Testament alone.' This statement of Fr McKenzie is unfortunately all too true, and he sets out to remedy it. He is highly successful; in fact we may say that as far as removing the difficulties and misconceptions which conspire to make the Old Testament impossibly difficult for most Catholics, he has written the best book of its kind to appear in English. Readers of the Old Testament will no longer be repelled nor disturbed by so many difficulties, when they have followed his lucid and thorough introduction into what will be for many of them a strange and fascinating world, in which both the ideas and the manner in which these ideas are presented seem so new. Without any doubt the greatest service this book renders Catholic readers of the Bible is the clear exposition of what is meant in practice by literary forms. Much has been written on this question in the wake of *Divino Afflante*, but apart from the practical difficulty of access to a thousand and one scattered articles, much of this writing has been hesitant, theoretical or vague. There is nothing vague about Fr McKenzie's presentation of this vital idea: 'What we call the "historical books" of the Old Testament contain the traditions of the ancient Hebrews about themselves; some traditions are nearer to the events, some are more remote, but they are all "stories"' (p. 4). 'The storyteller is not satisfied with a bare recital of names; his characters must live, and their actions must take on movement and realism. Therefore he tells what they felt, what they said, what they did, what they wore, and such things, even though he has no memory of these details. Were he an historian, he ought not to do this; but he would stand astonished if we were to tell him so. I, he would tell us, am a storyteller, not an historian; I do not know what you mean by historian. If people want lists of names and dates, let them look at the royal archives; I tell them

the story. . . . These are the stories which pass by word of mouth from generation to generation ; not history, nor yet fiction, even if they are memories fleshed out by creative imagination ' (pp. 61-2). The author is well aware how difficult it is for the modern Christian to accept these facts : ' We hesitate to attribute storytelling to God, because we fear that we shall charge Him with " historical error." ' Such a charge ignores the very nature of the story as we all know it. " Historical fact " and " historical error " are modern concepts, formulated by modern historical science and defined in terms of that science and its methods, these concepts would have been unintelligible to the storyteller ' (pp. 63-4). In this book will be found the perfect prescription for the cure of that modern disease which we may call ' historicism,' a disease which renders so many incapable of reading the Scriptures (or, for that matter, the legends of the saints) to their profit. In the same clear and convincing manner, the author discusses the question of cosmic and human origins, and lays to rest the spectres conjured up by modern scientific research into the origins of the world and of man, which have been so long dreaded as threats to the opening chapters of Genesis. In discussing Gen. 3 the author calls attention to the sexual milieu of the story, which, as he points out, has been insisted upon by J. Coppens, but which, we think, has not been much mentioned in popular works.

But the aim of this book is not simply to remove certain misconceptions of the literary forms to be found in the Bible, nor to solve objections regularly raised against the Old Testament. ' We believe that Catholic interpreters have often been more concerned with defending the Old Testament than with explaining it, more concerned with justifying it to unbelievers than to believers. They have made the Old Testament a battleground, a proving ground, but not the ground from which one ascends to God ' (p. 19). Is the Old Testament an asset or a liability ? Fr McKenzie faces the more important, and more difficult task, of showing the abiding value, the spiritual contribution, the practical significance of the Old Testament to the Catholic of today. He first of all utters a very pertinent warning, that the spiritual significance of the Old Testament is not to be sought by way of that tortuous allegorising which was beloved of, and most profitable to the Fathers : ' The spiritual fruits which will be gathered in this way do not grow from the Old Testament ; they sprout from the spiritual ingenuity of its commentators, who make the Old Testament an occasion, a springboard from which they soar into flights of spiritual speculation. Such flights can be admirable ; but why should they start from the Old Testament rather than from any other point ? ' (p. 18). It is in presenting the literal meaning

of the Old Testament, in showing the relationship between Israel and God, that the author offers to us the revelation of God's unchanging will towards man. He therefore considers the fundamental theological concepts which are embodied in the life and beliefs of the chosen People, in their institutions and in their hopes, in their tackling of such problems as the existence of evil and the after life. It is in these chapters that I have the slightest, the vaguest feeling of apprehension: in discussing the Israelite's hope for the future, his view of the problem of evil, and the importance he attached to concrete realities such as the body, there seems to be a certain atmosphere reminiscent of studies in the history of religions, a certain detachment which may lead the less careful reader to conclude that the Old Testament teaching is outmoded for the Christian of today. He might wrongly conclude that the New Testament has brought more fundamental changes than is the case; and that the New Testament has a more philosophical way of considering fundamental problems. To contrast the 'materialism' of the Old Testament with the 'spirituality' of the New is a highly delicate operation, and to speak of 'the exaggerated and worldly hope of the future, which, as we have seen, was the essential defect of the popular Hebrew idea of the future' (p. 243) would seem a threat to the delicate balance. Yet the author does avert such a threat: 'We have been at pains to show that (the Old Testament) denies the lasting value of the goods of this world; at the same time, we have noticed more than once that its mental atmosphere is concrete, material minded. Christianity, the spiritual heir of the Old Testament, is above all things a "spiritual" religion, "otherworldly." Now, this spiritual religion, bringing out what is implicit in the beliefs of this material-minded book, makes an affirmation which even the most crass modern materialist does not dare to make: an affirmation of the essential goodness and permanence of the animal life of man' (p. 263). And the author's final chapter on 'The Old and New' lays to rest any shadow of apprehension that he has examined the beliefs of the Hebrews with a trace of detached superiority, for here he shows how fundamental is the unity between Old and New Testaments, in how true a sense, in fact, the Old Testament can be said to be a Christian book. He even ventures to suggest that 'the theologians can well afford to re-examine their approach to the Old Testament and the methods according to which they use the Old Testament, and incorporate into their approach and their methods those discoveries of modern times which they find relevant to their purpose' (p. 306). The sword of the word of God is greatly weakened, perhaps ruined, if one of its edges is blunted.

T. WORDEN

BOOK REVIEWS

New Testament Abstracts. A Record of Current Periodical Literature, issued by the Jesuits of Weston College, Weston 93, Mass., U.S.A. Vol. I: No. 1, Fall 1956; No. 2, Winter 1957. To be published three times each year. \$3.00 annually, \$1.00 a single issue.

With apologies for the delay, I would like to bring the attention of readers of *Scripture* to this magnificent new project. The purpose of the editors is to provide a brief but accurate summary of all the important articles appearing in a large number of periodicals concerned with New Testament and allied subjects. It is generally acknowledged that the large number of periodicals which are now published makes it practically impossible for anyone to keep abreast of all that is being written on Biblical questions. This new project will be of the greatest assistance in this respect, for the two issues which have so far appeared show it to be a most competent and thorough record of current work. The editors have succeeded in enrolling a large number of collaborators for this task, and this enables them to keep their readers in touch with an amazing number of different periodicals published throughout the world. Each abstract is an objective summary of an article or review, and the abstracts are scientifically classified under many headings: Inspiration, Texts, Versions, Canon, Gospels (General), Synoptic Gospels, Gospel of St John, Character of the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles of St Paul, Catholic Epistles, Apocalypse, Biblical Theology, Archaeology, Dead Sea Scrolls, Intertestamental Studies, Rabbinical Literature, Apocrypha. There are also a number of abstracts from recently published books, along with abstracts from opinions on these. The editor, J. J. Collins, s.j., and his many collaborators are to be warmly congratulated on this courageous venture, and we wish them the greatest success. If they are given the support they deserve they will make a fine contribution to the progress of Biblical studies.

T. WORDEN

BOOKS RECEIVED

(The mention of books in this list neither implies nor precludes subsequent review)

Werner Bulst, s.j., *The Shroud of Turin*, tr. S. McKenna and J. J. Galvin. Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee 1957. pp. xviii + 167. \$4.75. This is a consideration of the data for and against the credibility of the Shroud, and is illustrated by a series of excellent photographs.

Dictionnaire de la Bible Supplément, Fasc. XXIX, ed. by Pirot-Robert-Cazelles. Letouzey et Ané, Paris 1957. Columns 1281-1480. Price not stated. This latest fascicule of the well-known *Supplément* completes the letter 'M,' and among others contains articles on the Biblical Setting, by the late Ch.-F. Jean, on Millenarism by A. Gelin, on Moses by H. Cazelles and on Music by E. Gerson-Kiwi.

Vincent McNabb, o.p., *Stars of Comfort*. Burns & Oates, London 1957. pp. 149. 15s. This is a collection of some of the retreat conferences given by Fr McNabb, arranged according to subject matter.

Thomas Merton, *The Psalms are our Prayer*. Paternoster Series No. 15. Burns & Oates, London 1957. pp. 42. 2s.

